DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 452 319 UD 034 143

AUTHOR	Richman, Sheldon
TITLE	Parent Power: Why National Standards Won't Improve Education. Policy Analysis No. 396.
INSTITUTION	Cato Inst., Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2001-04-26
NOTE	21p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Cato Institute, 1000 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20001 ($6). Tel: 800-767-1241 (Toll Free); Fax: 202-842-3490; Web site: http://www.cato.org.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Standards; *Accountability; Educational Improvement; Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; *Federal Government; Government Role; *National Standards; *Parent Participation; Politics of Education

ABSTRACT

President George W. Bush has unveiled an activist education plan that requires states to improve their worst schools or face sanctions from the federal government. The plan would tie Title I money to the states' adopting "clear, measurable goals focused on basic skills and essential knowledge" and testing children every year in grades 3-8. Meanwhile, the federal government would expand its own national test to check up on the states, resulting in a de facto federal curriculum. While Bush insists that accountability is the key to improvement, this paper argues that giving more power to the federal government is not the solution. , Rather, the paper suggests that what America needs is the "debureaucratization" of education which would make it possible for parents and education entrepreneurs to work together in a competitive marketplace to provide the best education for children. In such a system, standards in K-12 education, like those in higher education, would be set in a marketplace responsive to parents' demands and students' needs. This paper focuses on: (1) education standards in early America; (2) the modern standards movement; (3) the case for standards; (4) the case against standards; (5) whether or not the government should set educational standards; (6) the trouble with government standards; and (7) the alternative (parents in power and working within a competitive education market). (Contains 56 endnotes.) (SM)

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Policy Analysis

No. 396 April 26, 2001

Routing

ED 452 319

Parent Power

Why National Standards Won't Improve Education

by Sheldon Richman

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Executive Summary

President Bush has unveiled an activist education plan that requires states to improve their worst schools or face sanctions from the federal government. The plan would tie Title I money to the states' adopting "clear, measurable goals focused on basic skills and essential knowledge" and testing children every year in grades 3 through 8. Meanwhile, the federal government would expand its own national test to check up on the states, resulting in a de facto federal curriculum. Failure to improve could lead to schools' losing money, which might then be given directly to parents to use for tuition at private schools.

Although some people see the program as revolutionary, it is far from that. Bush insists that accountability is the key to improvement. He is absolutely right. But accountability to whom? He says the states should be accountable to the federal government. But that is just the sort of artificial accountability that has brought education to its present unsatisfactory condition. We are in roughly the 150th year of an experiment in which government, not parents, makes all the big decisions about children's educations. Teachers and administrators are theoretically accountable to school boards, which are theoretically accountable to state governments. Giving a larger role to yet a higher, more distant level of government hardly sounds promising.

What America needs instead is the "debureaucratization" of education, which would make it possible for parents and education entrepreneurs to work together in a competitive marketplace to provide the best education for children. Standards in K–12 education, like standards in higher education, should be set in a marketplace responsive to parents' demands and students' needs. *Parent Power*, that is, freeing parents to be fully responsible for their children's education, is the only way to make schools truly accountable.

Sheldon Richman is the editor of Ideas on Liberty, *published by the Foundation for Economic Education, and author of* Separating School and State: How to Liberate America's Families *(Future of Freedom Foundation, 1994).*

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Whereas Ronald Reagan pledged to abolish the U.S. Department of Education, the new Republican president enthusiastically embraces a vigorous role for the federal government.

> [T]here is power in asking the questions that others must answer.
>
> —Stephen Arons[1]

> Reagan is gone. . . . The New Deal . . . affirmed.
>
> —Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) on President George W. Bush's education plan[2]

Three days after taking the oath of office, President George W. Bush faced the American people and said: "My focus will be on making sure every child is educated. . . . We need real reform. Change will not come by disdaining or dismantling the federal role of education. I believe strongly in local control of schools. I trust local folks to chart the path to excellence. But educational excellence for all is a national issue, and at this moment a presidential priority."[3]

With those words the president unveiled a plan for federal activism in education that rivals anything proposed by his Democratic predecessors. Whereas Republican President Ronald Reagan pronounced government "the problem, not the solution" and pledged to abolish the U.S. Department of Education, the new Republican president enthusiastically embraces a vigorous role for the federal government. His first budget calls for an 11 percent increase in spending, to $44.5 billion, by the department.

More important, Bush promises to tie federal money, which today accounts for about 6 percent of what governments spend on elementary and secondary education, to new obligations for the states. He does so in the name of accountability. Specifically, he wishes to make Title I money, the funds the federal government allocates to the states and school districts for "disadvantaged students," contingent on performance. As the White House put it in a paper titled "Achieving Equality through High Standards and Accountability," the federal government will help the states "close the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their peers" by *requiring* recipients of Title I money to "ensure that students in all student groups meet high standards." States would have to do the following:

- Set "clear, measurable goals focused on basic skills and essential knowledge." Today most states have standards for reading and math. The Bush plan would also require standards for history and science.
- Perform "annual state assessments in math and reading in grades 3–8 [to] ensure that the goals are being met for every child, every year." The testing must be set up to allow year-to-year comparisons.
- Report on progress to the federal government. "These results must also be reported to the public disaggregated by race, gender, English language proficiency, disability, and socio-economic status."[4]

According to Bush's plan, failing schools would get assistance from the federal government, but if failure persisted, consequences would follow. Schools or districts that do not make "adequate yearly progress for one academic year" will be so identified and will be given special assistance. If, after two years, a school in that category has not improved, "the district must implement corrective action and offer *public school* choice to all students in the failing school" (emphasis added).

If a third year passes without adequate progress, "disadvantaged students within the school may use Title I funds to transfer to a higher performing public or private school, or receive supplemental educational services from a provider of choice." This is the voucher part of the plan, on which commentators believe Bush would be willing to compromise. That money, however, will not be free of conditions: "All non-public providers receiving federal money will be subject to appropriate standards of accountability." In other words, any private school that accepts a

voucher student would likely be subject to similar requirements. As usual, conditions accompany cash.

Schools and states that make "significant progress" will be rewarded with money from a new "No Child Left Behind" school bonus fund and an "Achievement in Education" state bonus fund. Conversely, schools in which disadvantaged students do not make "adequate yearly progress . . . will be subject to losing a portion of their administrative funds."

If the Bush plan is carried out, many states will have to make changes in their current policies. Although standards and related testing have been in vogue for the last 10 years or more, more than half the states would have to make big adjustments. *Education Week* reports that of the 15 states that test their 3rd- to 8th-graders in reading and math, only 7 use tests that are linked to their standards (criterion-referenced tests).[5]

On its face, Bush's plan emphasizes a commitment to local control and flexibility. States are to write the standards and tests. But the U.S. Department of Education will be looking over the states' shoulders to guard against standards and tests that are too easy. According to the Bush plan, "Progress on state assessments will be confirmed by state results on an annual sampling of 4th and 8th grade students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in math and reading."[6] That would require expanded use of the voluntary NAEP. According to *Education Week:* "In 1999-2000, 48 states signed up for the NAEP, but only 40 had their students take the tests because the others could not persuade enough schools to volunteer. Moreover, NAEP math and reading tests are administered only every two to four years."[7]

If progress claimed by a state is not reflected in the national test results, the federal government could impose sanctions. "It's kind of a third way" between federal testing and local control, said Margaret La Montagne, a senior campaign adviser to Bush. "It's a check on the states, and yet it's not terribly intrusive."[8]

State and federal results can differ dramatically. Michael Cohen, assistant secretary of education in the Clinton administration, points out that, although nearly 80 percent of 8th-graders in Louisiana passed a state math test in 1996, only 7 percent scored "proficient" or better on the NAEP.[9] A higher percentage of 10th-graders in Texas passed their state math test in 2000 than of 10th-graders in Massachusetts (86-55 percent), although students in Massachusetts score much better than Texans on the NAEP.[10]

Thus we can envision continuing conflict between the federal government and the states over standards. If the federal government ties its money to the states' improving student performance on an expanded NAEP, the result will be a de facto federal curriculum, since "he who writes the test writes the curriculum." So much for state control and flexibility.

Education Standards in Early America

The Bush education plan seeks to hold states and schools accountable on the basis of results measured by tests that are designed to gauge whether students meet "high standards" in reading, math, history, and science. The administration's focus on standards is being presented as something unprecedented, but in fact it is not as new as it seems. Even tying Title I money to requirements is not new. What is new is the threat of de facto federal standards, the frequency of the proposed testing, and the plan to turn money over to parents when a school fails for a period of time.

School districts and states have used standards, goals, and tests for many years. In fact, the original movement to establish comprehensive government schools, known as common schools when the movement began in Massachusetts in the 1830s, was an effort to *standardize* the academic, civic, and moral educational experiences of all children.[11] Because America's political system was a constitutionally defined federal republic, the focus of most early public school efforts was

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on the state and local levels. Yet over the years, advocates of government schooling have jumped at the chance to bring the federal government into play whenever the opportunity has arisen.

"The fact is that American education has a long history of standard-setting activity, sometimes overt and purposeful, at other times implicit and haphazard," writes education historian Diane Ravitch. "The current movement is grounded in a long tradition of efforts to establish agreement on what American students should know and be able to do and to measure whether and how well they have learned what was expected of them. Yet, despite this history of standard setting sponsored by various public and private agencies, never before has the federal government attempted to establish explicit national standards for what children should learn in school."[12]

However, through the 19th century there were de facto national standards because of the similarity of textbooks and other materials. "The uniformity found in the reading materials extended to classroom methods, with few exceptions," Ravitch writes. "American schools for most of the nineteenth century by and large had content standards, as defined by relatively uniform classroom materials, and they even had an implicit consensus about performance standards, with a broadly shared scale that ranged from A to F or 100 to 60. It was not exact, but educators had a common vocabulary with which to gauge student performance."[13]

Through the 19th century there were de facto national standards because of the similarity of textbooks and other materials.

College entrance requirements functioned as a means of assessing achievement in school, but, although those requirements had many similarities, they also had enough differences that efforts were made to create a degree of consistency. The cooperation between schools and colleges was mutually beneficial, simplifying the schools' task of helping students get into college and enabling colleges to effect changes in the schools' courses of study.

As the century wound down, educators grew concerned about the proliferation of new subjects in schools and the disorderly and inconsistent high-school curriculums that allegedly resulted. To suggest ways to allay those concerns, the National Education Association in 1892 set up the Committee of Ten, which consisted of Harvard University president Charles W. Eliot, U.S. Education Commissioner William T. Harris, presidents of four other colleges, three high-school principals, and a college faculty member. The prestigious panel succeeded in encouraging change in the curriculums of high schools and the entrance requirements of colleges. Notably, the committee recommended a uniform curriculum for both college-bound and non-college-bound students.

Around the same time, the College Entrance Examination Board was established to create consistent high-school and college-entrance standards. The first exam was given in 1901 in nine subjects, including Latin and Greek. It employed standards formulated by such authorities as the American Philological Association, the Modern Language Association, and the American Historical Association. Later, the board set up its own internal committees to write standards for secondary schools. The schools' need to equip students to pass the college entrance exam generated de facto national standards. Ravitch notes, "But these practices led to complaints about cramming and to criticism that the examination tested memory power rather than students' ability to use what they had learned."[14] The same criticisms are voiced today in connection with the call for standards and testing.

The preoccupation with college entrance and academics spawned a backlash, and the NEA created the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education. In 1918 the commission, chaired by the Massachusetts state high-school adviser, issued a report listing seven "main objectives of education": health, command of fundamental processes, worthy home-membership, vocation, citizenship, worthy use of leisure, and ethical character. For the commission, academic subjects had to justify themselves in

terms of those seven objectives. "The new 'standard' for high schools was based neither on the intellectual development of all youngsters nor on a commitment to the idea of liberal learning, but on preparing youngsters for present and future social and occupational roles," Ravitch writes. "The goal—the standard—was social efficiency."[15] Unlike the Committee of Ten's uniform curriculum, the recommendation of the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education was multiple courses of study, including agriculture, business, industry, fine arts, and household arts. In time the advocates of curriculum differentiation and student tracking prevailed over the advocates of a single curriculum for all students.

In the 1920s, responding to the charge that it had too much to say about what high schools taught, the College Board gave its blessing to "general intelligence examinations" instead of exams linked to specific curriculums that tested for particular academic knowledge. The result was the Scholastic Aptitude Test, the product of the new "science" of intelligence testing that was developed around the time of World War I. It claimed to assess students' linguistic and mathematical prowess and ability to do college work without being interfering with what the schools taught.

In succeeding years, de facto national education standards emerged because of the popularity of standardized testing and the uniformity of textbooks. "[T]he widespread adoption of standardized achievement tests relieved states and districts of the need to set their own explicit academic standards. In both cases educators relegated the all-important task of deciding what children should know and be able to do to commercial testmakers."[16] Regarding textbooks, Ravitch writes: "A similar story can be told about the role of textbooks as a standardizing element in American education. . . . Produced for mass market sales in a highly competitive marketplace, textbooks are written to satisfy the largest buyers, especially the textbook-adoption committees of large states such as Texas and California. Because textbooks have such an important role in determining what content is taught and because they are so widely used as a basic instructional took, they effectively determine what children learn."[17]

Reliance on testing went from de facto to de jure in 1965 when the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act required the states to administer standardized achievement tests to "disadvantaged" students. In the following decade more tests were mandated by states that wanted students to demonstrate minimum competency before proceeding with the next stage of their education. By the late 1980s most states were using standardized tests. "During this same era textbooks became more uniform than ever, as big companies gobbled up little companies and as a small number of textbooks in each field captured a larger percentage of the market."[18]

Exogenous events also drove states and school districts to heighten their concern about course content and student achievement. The most prominent was the Soviet launch of *Sputnik* in 1957, which led to the National Defense Education Act a year later. The Soviet feat made educators and public officials fear that American schools were inferior in science and related instruction. As a result, there was a short-lived but intense effort to get more children to study science, math, and foreign languages. Ravitch writes that during this period the high-school graduation rate increased to nearly 77 percent and test scores improved.[19]

The pendulum swung again in the turmoil of the 1960s, bringing with it a rebellion against traditional schooling and a shift away from academics and stringent college entrance standards. "At the end of the period [1975], college entrance requirements were markedly lower than they had been in the early 1960s (fewer colleges required knowledge of a foreign language, for example), and many students had shifted away from the academic curriculum to nonacademic tracks."[20]

By that time, reports of a decline in standardized test scores, including SAT scores, were causing alarm in some circles. Many

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blamed the deemphasis of academics. Reports generated by President Jimmy Carter's administration found that declining numbers of students were studying foreign languages and that science and engineering instruction was in disrepair. The anxiety continued into the 1980s.[21]

The Modern Standards Movement

The modern standards movement began in 1983 with the issuance of a report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Education. Titled "A Nation at Risk," the study warned: "The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments."[22] The report presented a picture of American children falling behind their foreign counterparts, rising functional illiteracy, declining SAT scores, weak higher-order intellectual skills, and a growing need for remedial math classes at colleges.

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In calling for "excellence in education," the report, using language that has become increasingly familiar, said:

> Excellence characterizes a school or college that sets high expectations and goals for all learners, then tries in every way possible to help students reach them. . . . Our goal must be to develop the talents of all to their fullest. Attaining that goal requires that we expect and assist all students to work to the limits of their capabilities. We should expect schools to have genuinely high standards rather than minimum ones, and parents to support and encourage their children to make the most of their talents and abilities.

"A Nation at Risk" succeeded in focusing the nation's attention on the deficiencies of American education and the search for solutions. Ravitch comments:

> The response to *A Nation at Risk* was unprecedented. In 1984 the U.S. Department of Education summarized the extraordinary press attention, public interest, and state-level reforms encouraged by that single report. Hundreds of state-level task forces addressed education issues, seeking ways to raise standards, improve textbooks, lengthen the school day or year, or improve the teaching profession. Business groups and universities became actively involved in collaborative programs to strengthen primary and secondary education.[23]

Ravitch notes that southern states led the crusade to improve educational inputs, including teachers' pay, student-teacher ratios, and per capita spending. New requirements for high-school graduation, including exams, were initiated. The results were received with enthusiasm: the dropout rate fell for all groups, scores went up, and more students took academic courses and attended college.[24]

But the reformers had more in mind. Interest had been mounting in writing explicit standards—a list of expectations about what students should know and be able to do at different stages of their education. This move toward detailed content standards was fueled by works such as E. D. Hirsch Jr.'s *Cultural Literacy*, which attempted to specify the facts everyone should know.[25]

The standards movement got a major boost in 1989 when President George H. W. Bush and the nation's governors held a summit in Charlottesville, Virginia, and announced a joint effort to set ambitious education goals for the nation's schools with a target year of 2000. The president's attempt to codify the goals in his America 2000 legis-

lation foundered on political controversies and turf rivalries. Before the Bush administration expired, however, the Department of Education allocated money to outside groups to write national standards for science, history, geography, the arts, civics, foreign languages, and English.

The Clinton administration picked up where the Bush administration had left off. As governor of Arkansas, Clinton had been a high-profile participant at the Charlottesville summit. Once he became president, America 2000 became Goals 2000, a program to set national objectives for America's schools. The legislation, passed in 1994, proclaimed that in six years:

- All children in America would start school ready to learn.
- The high school graduation rate would increase to at least 90 percent.
- All students would leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign language, civics and government, economics, the arts, history, and geography, and every school in America would ensure that all students learned to use their minds well, so they would be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our nation's economy.
- U.S. students would be the first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.
- Every adult would be literate and possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
- Every school in the United States would be free of drugs, violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and would offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.
- The nation's teaching force would have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century.
- Every school would promote partnerships to increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.[26]

Strictly speaking, the goals were to be voluntary, but states had to subscribe to them to obtain new federal funding. Moreover, the goals were to be integrated with other federal programs, such as Title I. The legislation called for the creation of several boards that would have jurisdiction over many aspects of education and more, including vocational schooling and work standards. Most ominous of those was the National Education Standards and Improvement Council, which was quickly dubbed the "national school board." Its mission was to have been to review and approve the states' plans to achieve the national goals.

Goals 2000, like its predecessor, America 2000, foundered on controversy, particularly the right wing's apprehension about *national* standards and testing and the left wing's belief that children should not be held to high standards before all schools are funded equally. President Clinton never appointed the members of the National Education Standards and Improvement Council, and, after the Republicans took over Congress in 1995, they abolished it.

Goals 2000 thus ended up being similar to a block-grant program for the states; money was allocated and little was asked in return. But before its virtual demise, the American people got a taste of what government-sponsored content standards could be like. In 1992 the National Endowment for the Humanities and the U.S. Department of Education jointly financed the development of history education standards by the National Center for History in the Schools at the University of California at Los Angeles.

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Those standards, had they been approved by the Goals 2000 bureaucracy, would have been pushed for adoption by the states. Instead, in 1994 they set off a firestorm of controversy led by Lynne V. Cheney, who had chaired the NEH when the National Center was commissioned to write the standards. In a now-famous article in the *Wall Street Journal*, Cheney condemned the standards as an exercise that put Western-bashing political correctness ahead of good history. She feared that an "official knowledge" would be adopted, "with the result that much that is significant in our past will begin to disappear from our schools."[27] The irony is that, until the standards were released, she favored in principle the government's adoption of an "official knowledge." Many echoed Cheney's sentiments, and the U.S. Senate expressed its outrage against the history standards in a 99-to-1 vote.[28]

The standards were revised in 1996, winning praise from such critics of the original version as Diane Ravitch and Arthur Schlesinger Jr.[29] But it was too late. The controversy took the wind out of the sails of Goals 2000 and the standards movement—if only temporarily.

This historical recitation shows that there is nothing new about government-driven commitments to having America's public schools carry out lofty goals, fulfill high standards, and demand more of students. Whether it was called "back to basics" or "outcome-based education," for roughly 150 years government has delivered a school system with a de facto national curriculum. As Diane Ravitch, an advocate of national standards and testing, writes: "If visitors from another nation were dropped into an American public school classroom without knowing the state or the region, they would likely see the same lesson taught in the same way to children of the same age. In the most important subjects, schools throughout the country use textbooks that are so similar in content as to be indistinguishable from each other. The same is true of tests."[30]

So what's the problem? Replies Ravitch: "[The curriculum] is not a very good one. . . . This informal national curriculum is usually geared to minimal competencies, and expectations about what students should learn are consistently low and unchallenging."[31]

The federal government's latest proclamations about leading the way to excellence in education should be kept in proper perspective. The Bush plan constitutes a more deliberate step toward central planning of education than did the earlier efforts that produced de facto national curriculums. Still, at each point, a political entity—government—was in charge of the schools, and parents were assured that their children were in the hands of experts. Yet, at nearly regular intervals, the schools have been criticized as deficient, and new, improved schools have been promised. Perhaps rather than simply adopt new standards, new tests, and new promises, we should fundamentally rethink how education is organized. Maybe it's time for an entirely new institutional setting.

The Case for Standards

Advocates of government standard setting insist that the enumeration of explicit goals for education is indispensable to excellence in schooling. They repeatedly point out that, if schools are to do their jobs, students must know what is expected of them at each stage—what they are to know and be able to do. Such content standards are to be reinforced by performance standards, which specify how students are to demonstrate their mastery of subjects. For the advocates of government standards, testing is an integral part of the process. Without testing, no one can tell if the standards are being met. Advocates of standards and testing often assert that the students who outdo Americans in international comparisons come from countries that have national standards backed up by standardized exams.

The most compelling advocate of national standards, Ravitch, has outlined six reasons for them:

- "Standards can improve achievement by clearly defining what is to be taught and what kind of performance is expected."
- "Standards (national, state, and local) are necessary for equality of opportunity." Through standards, Ravitch writes, all students can be given "the same educational opportunities and the same performance expectations, regardless of who their parents are or what neighborhood they live in."
- "National standards provide a valuable coordinating function." Without them, the components of the education complex—teacher education, textbook writing, test making—will fail to work together. The result will be inconsistency and conflict.
- "There is no reason to have different standards in different states, especially in mathematics and science, when well-developed international standards have already been developed for these fields."
- "Standards and assessments provide consumer protection by supplying accurate information to students and parents."
- "Standards and assessments serve as an important signaling device to students, parents, teachers, employers, and colleges." Without them, none of the interested parties can know with clarity what's expected of students and how well they are living up to expectations.[32]

Ravitch insists on the need for government-sponsored standards despite the failure of the recent attempts to put them in place. "National standards—not federal standards managed by the federal government—are a necessity in an advanced society operating in a highly interdependent, competitive global economy," she writes. "The United States is one nation, not fifty independent states. It makes little sense for each state to have markedly different standards in mathematics, science, English, and other important subjects."[33]

"'Education' means to lead forth," Ravitch sums up, "but it is impossible to lead anyone anywhere without knowing where you want to go. If you do not know what you are trying to accomplish, you will not accomplish much. Content standards—what children are expected to learn—are necessary for educational improvement because they are the starting point for education."[34]

The Case against Standards

Opponents of the standards movement within the education profession build their case on the principle that standards require standardized tests, which in turn foster undue dependence on what is measurable, when often the most important things about education are immeasurable. For that reason, opponents often claim that standards and testing "narrow the curriculum" to the kinds of things that can be reduced to multiple-choice exams; that is, teaching becomes little more than "teaching to the test" and learning little more than test-taking preparation and memorization. This is said to diminish the importance of understanding as well as ignore the differences among students and their learning styles.

Critics of testing also object to the use of tests for tracking students, differentiating curriculums, and compromising the egalitarian ideal that is said to be at the heart of public schools. They further point out that "high-stakes" testing not only puts destructive pressure on children; it also creates perverse incentives for teachers, whose salaries and careers can be affected by scores. Critics point to the rash of reports in 1999 of teachers cheating in various ways to help their students do better on tests.[35]

Alfie Kohn, a leading critic of "tougher standards" and standardized testing, sums up the "five fatal flaws":

- "This approach proceeds from the assumption—one so widely shared as to be taken largely for granted—that stu-

Standards require standardized tests, which foster undue dependence on what is measurable, when often the most important things about education are immeasurable.

dents ought to be thinking constantly about improving their performance." He cites research showing that children learn more when their objective is to understand rather than to get high scores and good grades.

- "The Tougher Standards movement tends to favor *Old-School teaching*, the sort of instruction that treats kids as though they were inert objects, that prepares a concoction called 'basic skills' or 'core knowledge' and then tries to pour it down children's throats."
- "This movement is *wedded to standardized testing*. 'Excellence' and 'higher standards' typically mean higher test scores, and that is what schools are pressed to produce. . . . All the limits of, and problems with, such testing amount to a serious indictment of the version of school reform that relies on these tests."
- "The Tougher Standards movement usually consists of *imposing specific requirements and trying to coerce improvement* by specifying exactly what must be taught and learned—that is, by mandating a particular kind of education. . . . [W]e should be wary of the assumption that the way one changes education is simply to compel teachers and students to do things differently."
- The move for Tougher Standards implicitly assumes that "harder is better."[36]

Underlying this debate is a conflict of philosophies and conceptions of human nature. Indeed, it is a clash of ultimate worldviews.

At least one researcher disagrees with the argument that the countries with the highest scores in international comparisons excel because they have national curriculums. In 1988 Richard M. Wolf, professor of psychology and education at Teachers College, Columbia University, could find no such pattern in the results from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study. For example, according to Wolf, of the 17 countries finishing ahead of the United States in 7th-grade mathematics, 5 had no national curriculum. In 8th-grade math, the number was 6. In science, while no country without a national curriculum outdid U.S. 7th-graders, and only 2 such countries bested U.S. 8th-graders; 7th-graders from 14 countries *with* national curriculums did worse than 7th-graders from the United States, and 8th-graders from 12 such countries scored below U.S. 8th-graders. "The absence of a relationship between having a national curriculum or syllabus and performance in mathematics and science at grades seven and eight raises serious questions as to whether having a national curriculum or syllabus is likely to lead to higher student achievement," Wolf wrote.[37]

Should the Government Set Educational Standards?

The supporters and opponents of government-set standards and testing press their cases vigorously. Neither side has a shortage of data purporting to demonstrate the merits of its arguments. Many standardized test scores fell beginning about 1970 and didn't plateau (or in some cases recover somewhat) until the 1980s. "[T]he academic skills of the average American young person have been flat or slipping for at least three decades," writes education historian Andrew Coulson.[38] Yet the critics of testing make a legitimate point when they suggest that the vital elements of a true education are not captured by standardized tests and achievement of rigid goals.

Underlying this debate is a conflict of philosophies and conceptions of human nature. Indeed, it is a clash of ultimate worldviews. Traditional schools were built on the factory model, with children seen as undifferentiated lumps of wax to be molded into a preconceived shape by authoritarian teachers carrying out a scientific curriculum.[39] That doesn't necessarily mean that today's advocates of such schools share that view of children; nevertheless, the schools they favor were built on that premise. On the other hand, much radical criticism of the schools is based on the mistaken belief that they are essential to prepare children for their place in

capitalist society, which is seen as inhospitable to human nature. But history is replete with critics of traditional schools who favored capitalism. They include Herbert Spencer and Auberon Herbert.

It is not the purpose of this paper to resolve the debate between the traditionalists and nontraditionalists over which methods of education are best. In light of the differences among children, it would not be surprising to discover that different methods are better for different learners.[40]

The purpose of this paper, rather, is to establish which institutional setting is most likely to lead us to discover the best methods of encouraging children to learn. There really are only two choices: an institutional setting based on individual freedom or one based on coercion, that is, government.

Government is usually discussed euphemistically, but its defining characteristic is its ability to use aggressive force legally. In other words, it can employ coercion against those who have not themselves initiated the use of force. Taxation is the quintessential example of the use, or the threat of use, of legal aggressive force. Compulsory school attendance laws are another example.

Considering that all philosophies of education rest on a view of human nature, we must ask: Is this something we should ask government (at any level) to sort out? Can it do so and still respect the freedom of parents, children, and taxpayers?

Most Americans embrace the separation of church and state on the grounds that something as important and personal as religion ought to be left to private decisionmaking and not to the coercive apparatus of government. The inviolability of the individual conscience is a cherished American principle. Yet decisions about one's children's education are equally personal and private. They are equally matters of conscience. Nevertheless, government routinely makes all the big decisions about education without regard to the preferences and convictions of parents and their children. Such decisions cannot help but impinge on freedom of conscience. From the beginning, the movement to establish tax-financed government school systems created conflicts among people with different worldviews, starting with Protestants and Catholics. "The apparently endless school wars are also disheartening," writes Stephen Arons, professor of legal studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, "because among their most prominent casualties has been freedom of conscience in education—the individual liberty to follow an internal moral compass in setting a course for a meaningful and fulfilling life."[41]

The debates that have taken place over school curriculums—multiculturalism versus Western orientation, evolution versus creationism, phonics versus whole language, traditional math versus new math—have been grounded in diverging views of how children should learn and think. Government-generated standards and curriculums cannot avoid controversy. The fights over how to teach math, reading, and science have been just as bitter as the fights over how to teach history. When the government imposes a curriculum, it is imposing a worldview and a set of values on children, often against the will of their parents. Indeed, a noncontroversial curriculum is as chimerical as a value-free education. Thus the claims that a government-adopted curriculum would create solidarity by inculcating children with a common educational experience are highly suspect. What has caused more social division in recent years than public education?

At the very least, then, those who would have government control education have a heavy burden of proof. But rather than wait for them to bear their burden (we've waited 150 years), we can offer strong reasons why politically based school systems are inimical to children, families, freedom in general, and the integrity of our society.

The first reason applies only to the federal government. Few people explicitly favor having the federal government impose a curriculum and testing on the nation's schools. But as we've seen in the Bush plan, virtually the same result can occur implicitly. Whether the federal government's power over educa-

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To put it bluntly, federal activity with respect to education is unconstitutional.

tion is mandatory or "voluntary" (that is, tied to federal money), its constitutionality is dubious. The U.S. Constitution created a central government of delegated and enumerated powers. This means that powers not enumerated in Article I, section 8, or elsewhere in the Constitution may not be exercised by the central government. And to leave no doubt about the issue, the first Congress adopted the Bill of Rights, the Tenth Amendment of which states, "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States, respectively, or to the people." The upshot is that Congress cannot legitimately legislate on any matter it pleases. Nor may it exercise power on the vague grounds that it serves the general welfare. The references to the general welfare were not intended as a grant of plenary power but rather as a rationale for the powers that were enumerated. As James Madison put it, "With respect to the words 'general welfare,' I have always regarded them as qualified by the detailed powers connected with them. To take them in a literal and unlimited sense would be a metamorphosis of the Constitution into a character which there is a host of proofs was not contemplated by its creators."[42] To put it bluntly, federal activity with respect to education is unconstitutional.

The Trouble with Government Standards

Even if it were not unconstitutional, government control of schools, curriculums, and testing would be a bad idea. Governments operate virtual school monopolies. Since they are financed through the coercive tax system and do not charge explicit fees, those school systems compete unfairly with private (for-profit and nonprofit) schools. Consequently, an estimated 90 percent of children attend government schools; sending one's children to nongovernment schools entails the payment of tuition in addition to taxes. This constrains the demand for alternative schools and thus the supply of such schools.

Government schools therefore are outside the competitive marketplace. On superficial examination, that may be taken to mean only that business people do not run the schools with the intent of making a profit. But the competitive marketplace is more than a way to organize production of known products and services according to known methods. It is, it the words of Nobel laureate F. A. Hayek, a "procedure for the discovery of such facts as, without resort to it, would not be known to anyone, or least would not be utilized."[43] Competition enables us to learn things that we would not learn otherwise from people we might never suspect of being capable of teaching us anything.[44] This is as true for the provision of education as for anything else.

As Hayek pointed out, the challenge to any society is to marshal the incomplete and scattered knowledge that exists and to encourage the discovery of new knowledge, so that it may be used for people's betterment. Central planning has shown itself to be particularly inept at that task.

Education in America is largely run according to the central-planning model. Indeed, as the late Albert Shanker, long-time president of the American Federation of Teachers, acknowledged: "It's time to admit that public education operates like a planned economy, a bureaucratic system in which everybody's role is spelled out in advance and there are few incentives for innovation and productivity. It's no surprise that our school system doesn't improve: It more resembles the communist economy than our own market economy."[45]

This aspect of government schooling cannot be fixed. The problem has nothing to do with the motives of the education planners. It is a systemic flaw, a defining mark of a bureaucracy, which gets its revenues through the compulsory tax system and its students through compulsory attendance laws.

The Bush plan stresses the need for accountability. But this is precisely where

government solutions show their weakness. Accountability is indeed important. But accountability to whom? Bush says that the states should be accountable to the federal government. But that is just the sort of artificial accountability that has brought education to its present unsatisfactory condition. We are in roughly the 150th year of an experiment in which government, not parents, makes all the big decisions about children's educations. Teachers and administrators are theoretically accountable to school boards, which are theoretically accountable to state governments. Giving a larger role to yet a higher, more distant level of government hardly sounds promising.

Real accountability would mean accountability to parents, whose children are supposed to be educated. But a politically based education system can never really be accountable to parents. First of all, in a democratic system, government agencies are theoretically supposed to serve all citizens, not just parents. Someone without children has as much say as parents do.[46]

Second, any one citizen's clout is minuscule because one vote is rarely decisive in elections. A parent unhappy with his child's school can complain and perhaps even change schools. But to make a major change in the system, a parent would have to undertake the Herculean task of electing a new school board, new state officials, and, considering the growing influence of the federal government, new national officeholders. True, the parent could withdraw his child and homeschool him or send him to private school. But the parent must continue supporting the government's schools financially.

Government education and concomitant standard setting have other bad consequences as well. Among them is the false sense of security they give parents. Andrew Coulson points out that advocates of government standards, such as Diane Ravitch, have been unable to demonstrate that standards can improve student performance. (As noted, Richard Wolf has shown that a national curriculum is neither necessary nor sufficient for high test scores.) As Coulson writes: "Having clear goals is a requirement for success in almost any undertaking, but goals are meaningless when the incentives and infrastructure needed to reach them are not in place. Tacking national curriculum standards onto government-run schools could not possibly bring about a major improvement in education outcomes because the lack of such standards is not the reason government schools are failing."[47]

A government-set curriculum also gives a false sense that the prescribed course of study is best for all children. But children differ from one another. They learn at different rates and by different methods. One size definitely does not fit all. And governments are notoriously bad at tailoring services to individual differences. The more centralized the administration, the more this deficiency is magnified. To make matters worse, no curriculum can escape being arbitrary to a large extent. As education writers and homeschool advocates David and Micki Colfax put it:

> The public school curriculum—which includes, at least theoretically, what is to be learned and when—is in fact nothing more than a hodgepodge of materials and assumptions resulting from the historical interplay of educational theories, political expedience, education fads and fashions, pretensions to culture, demagoguery, and demography. It is by no means, as professional educators would have it, a coherent "course of study" or, as the more pretentious among them would have it, a "distillation of our common culture."[48]

Educationists from Horace Mann to E. D. Hirsch Jr. have claimed a scientific foundation for their prescriptions. "The trouble with all such views," wrote Bruce Goldberg, "is that their authors are deluded in thinking that their plans are [in Robert Owen's words] 'derived from the unvarying facts of the creation.' . . . Every one of those mind-designing

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Children differ from one another. They learn at different rates and by different methods.

schemes, however, when looked at closely, has turned out to have little to do with either science or order. What one finds is pure subjectivity offered as science and arbitrariness disguised as order."[49]

Yet another danger is that, once educational requirements are enshrined in law, changing them becomes difficult. Bureaucracies move slowly. Even when errors are discovered, corrective change can take a long time. In an open-ended world, error and discovery are inevitable. Why freeze a curriculum in law when discoveries are bound to reveal mistakes? On the other hand, making the standards so general as to mitigate this danger would destroy the objective of the standards movement.

Moreover, a free society should be wary of any attempt by government to formulate an official version of what is to be learned. Government is not some saintly institution devoid of particular interests and agendas. On the contrary, it is a group of mortals who have no greater insight into the "public interest" (if such even exists apart from the total of individual interests) than anyone else. Nor are they immune to the things that motivate others, such as prestige, income, ideological objectives, and power. (The difference is that they obtain their resources through compulsion and therefore cannot be ignored by the rest of us.) It is folly to believe that those interests would not influence the process by which a government curriculum would be written. Private-sector interests hoping for lucrative contracts from the government, for example, textbook publishers and test writers, would also influence that process. Our experience with government contracting gives us no reason to believe that the curriculum-generating process would be in any sense objective.

The Alternative

The case against having government determine the content of education is a corollary of the case for an open liberal society based on individual rights, including property rights. But are there to be no standards for education? Of course not. It is an unfortunate emblem of the contemporary world that alternatives to government services are difficult to imagine—even when there are historical examples to draw on.

We do not face a choice between government standards for education and no standards at all, no more than we face a choice between government standards for computers and no standards at all. The spontaneous, self-adjusting market process is well qualified to generate standards. And it does so in a way that avoids the pitfalls of the political process.

Standards are generated by the market's entrepreneurial process. I noted above that we live in a world where error is ubiquitous. What can a great society do to hasten the discovery and correction of error? Fortunately, we have a method: entrepreneurship in a competitive market. Entrepreneurs search the landscape for instances in which resources are being underused, that is, devoted to the production of goods and services that consumers value less highly than other things to which those resources might be devoted. What lures entrepreneurs to discover those instances is the prospect of profit. Nothing approaches the power of the profit motive in stimulating such discovery. Profit accrues when an alert entrepreneur, noticing what others have overlooked, switches resources from producing things consumers value less highly to producing things consumers value more highly.[50]

The application of this principle to education is straightforward. Since we don't know today all that we may learn about educational methods and objectives tomorrow, we need real entrepreneurship in education. There is no good substitute for the decentralized, spontaneous entrepreneurial process that the separation of school and state would stimulate.

To the extent that parents want similar things with respect to their children's education—a broadening of horizons and preparation for college or for economic self-suffi-

ciency—the market will furnish them because doing so will produce profits for the providers. And out of that process will emerge standards. We should expect not one set of standards but competing sets of standards with varying degrees of differences. Fears that the standards set by the market won't be "national" are unfounded. The marketplace itself is "national" and increasingly global. Schools can be expected to prepare children for life in a world integrated by commerce and cultural exchange.

Parents would draw on formal and informal sources of information in choosing an approach to education that appeared to be best for their children. We can expect to see brand names attached to competing standards, because brand names help consumers economize on search costs. Thus providers of education will strive for good reputations that would be invoked by their brand names. We see this, for instance, with Edison Schools, Kaplan, and Hooked on Phonics. For analogies in other markets, we can look to Underwriters Laboratories and the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval.[51]

Different approaches to education in a competitive market will lead to competition, which in turn will lead to new discoveries about what works best. It is precisely the competition among standards—real-world rivalrous activity, not ivory tower debates—that will teach us things we would not learn otherwise. The market, moreover, will do what governments cannot do: it will avoid the extremes of dogmatism (one imposed standard) and chaos (no stable standards). This is what the competitive market has accomplished in the computer industry, where network effects make standards indispensable, and in any other field one can name. At any given time, a manageable number of standards will coexist, giving people stability and predictability, yet no standard will be locked in by legislation, which would threaten stagnation. It's the best of both worlds.

Entirely too many people worry about standards in the sense that they believe a powerful authority, government, must be responsible if the work is to be done. But that betrays a failure to appreciate the vastly complex and useful social institutions—markets and language come to mind—that had no designers. They are called "spontaneous orders," and they feature, among other things, standards that enable human beings to accomplish important things. That's why they endure. They do so precisely because human beings have important things to accomplish and do not wish to bother with institutions that don't further their objectives.

There should be no mystery about why all languages have grammars, that is, standards. It's not because government designed and imposed them. It's because people wanted to communicate. Given that wish, a standardless language is about as possible as a square circle. Something like natural selection would have disposed of a standardless language very quickly.

Similarly, a free education market lacking reasonable standards is an impossibility. It would require a large number of parents who didn't wish their children to grow into autonomously functioning adults. In other words, the call for the imposition of standards is an insult to every responsible parent.

The entrepreneurial system gives us the greatest hope of having the best educational institutions possible. We can expect it to offer a wide variety of schools, from traditional to innovative, for-profit and nonprofit, secular and sectarian. Homeschooling would thrive also.[52]

But entrepreneurship has prerequisites. It requires freedom and private property on both the supply and the demand side.

On the supply side, entrepreneurs must be free to offer any services directly to parents, without having to obtain the permission of a bureaucracy. It makes a difference whether a provider has to please parents or government officials. That is why popular reforms, such as charter schools, ultimately cannot fix what is wrong with the education system. Charter schools are accountable not to parents but to bureaucrats, who must approve the schools'

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missions and determine whether the missions are being fulfilled. In the marketplace, education entrepreneurs will have to be concerned with what parents want for their children. This doesn't mean that the only offerings will be what parents have chosen in the past. In any industry there are innovators who are ahead of the market. They offer goods and services that people don't yet want because they are unaware of them. But if the innovations satisfy a consumer need, they eventually find a market. What was once avant-garde is today mainstream. The same will be true in an education market.

The government's bureaucratic virtual monopoly is ill-suited to engaging in entrepreneurial discovery. As I have already pointed out, elected officials and bureaucrats, despite the best motives, do not have the profit incentive or the information required to find better ways of educating children. (The achievement of higher test scores is not to be mistaken for educating.) They have more than the children's interests to be concerned with, such as the demands of teachers' unions. Even if school board members, principals, and teachers want to find better methods of educating, they are in no position to engage in appropriate experimentation. Yet experimentation—trial and error—is important to discovery in an open-ended world. Joseph Priestley observed that education is an art requiring "experiments and trials," "unbounded liberty, and even caprice." He added that "from new and seemingly irregular methods, perhaps something extraordinary and uncommonly great may spring."[53]

Government school systems do engage in experimentation, but of an inappropriate kind in at least two respects. It is not checked by consumers' freedom to say no and to withhold their money. Compulsory schools impose experimentation on children; hence the fads we've seen come and go over the years. Moreover, when governments experiment, they risk committing errors that will affect thousands, even millions, of children over a long period. By contrast, error in the marketplace tends to occur on a far smaller scale and for a shorter period of time.

On the demand side, parents must be free to control their own money and make the educational choices they believe best for their children. They must be able to deal with providers directly, rather than through a bureaucratic barrier. If they are unhappy with a school, they must be free to take their money to another school without having to get the permission of a government official or to launch a political campaign. That is real clout and real accountability. We may call it *Parent Power*.[54]

In a competitive education market, parents will have to be more knowledgeable about education services than they are now. One of the detrimental effects of government schooling is that parents are encouraged to remain on the sidelines, assured that "experts" are seeing to their children's education. In a free market, parents will have to pay more attention, since they will select not only the schools but also the approach to education. But this does not mean that parents will have to become experts in esoteric disciplines. The market will provide ample sources of information for laymen, just as today the market provides a variety of guides to picking a college. Parents will also rely on word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and neighbors. Less-informed parents will be able to free ride on the research done by better-informed parents, since the schools that cater to the latter will simultaneously cater to the former.

We already see this process at work today, though on a smaller scale, in the market for private education. "Millions of parents have been making decisions about nonpublic schools for many years, with no serious problems resulting from this largely unregulated process," writes education scholar Charles Glenn.[55]

Low-income parents would be able to afford private education (one must remember that today's market for nongovernment education is artificially constrained by the government's own system). If the demand for alternative schools were freed and taxes were kept low, education would be more affordable. As is

What we need is to make it possible for parents and education entrepreneurs to work together in a competitive marketplace to provide the best education for children.

the case with any product or service, there would be a range of schools from the very expensive to the low cost. While relatively inexpensive schools might not have the prestige of their high-priced counterparts, they would still offer students the opportunity to learn. What a given student does with that opportunity will ultimately be up to him.

Low-income students would also be able to count on private scholarships from philanthropists and tuition subsidies from private schools. These have been available throughout American history.

The virtues of a free market in education are not "just theory." There is ample historical experience to show that, when parents and entrepreneurs are left free, they come up with highly effective arrangements for educating children. Ancient Athens, England, and early America are just three examples of what a free market in education can achieve.[56]

Conclusion

The Bush education plan is merely another in a long line of government promises to fix the education system—promises that have never been kept despite all good intentions. Increasing the Department of Education's budget and using federal money to force states to come up with yet another set of standards and tests are not going to improve the schools. Nor will it help to have the federal government checking up on the states through expanded use of the NEAP test. In the end, Bush's plan would impose another layer of bureaucracy on an already overbureaucratized system.

What we need instead is the "debureaucratization" of education, to make it possible for parents and education entrepreneurs to work together in a competitive marketplace to provide the best education for children. Only that system would free the entrepreneurship necessary for discovering the best ways to educate. Only that system would free parents to act in the best interest of their children. Only that system would respect the integrity of family and conscience. The way to make education as good as it can be is to unleash *Parent Power*.

Notes

1. Stephen Arons, *Short Route to Chaos: Conscience, Community, and the Re-Constitution of American Schooling* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), p. 85.

2. . Quoted in Robert G. Kaiser, "Here They Go. But Where?" *Washington Post,* Outlook, January 7, 2001, p. B2.

3. "Excerpt from Bush Statement Announcing Start of His Education Initiative," *New York Times,* January 24, 2001, <www.nytimes.com/2001/01/24/politics/24BTEX.html?printpage=yes>.

4. White House, "Achieving Equality through High Standards and Accountability," undated, <www.whitehouse.gov/news/reports/no-child-left-behind.html#1>.

5. Lynn Olson, "Few States Are Now in Line with Bush Testing Plan," *Education Week,* January 31, 2001, <www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=20test.h20>.

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9. Ibid.

10. Alain Jehlen, "Can the Standards Movement Be Saved?" *NEAToday Online,* January 2001, <www.nea.org/neatoday/0101/cover.html>.

11. "Obviously, schools and public school systems existed in the United States before the 1830s. What was different about the common school movement was the establishment and standardization of state systems of education designed to achieve specific public policies." Joel Spring, *The American School: 1642–1985* (New York: Longman, 1986), p. 70.

12. Diane Ravitch, *National Standards in American Education: A Citizen's Guide* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1995), p. 33.

13. Ibid., p. 35.

14. Ibid., p. 41.

15. Ibid., p. 42.

16. Ibid., p. 47.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., p. 48.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., p. 49.

21 See, for example, President's Commission of Foreign Language and International Studies, *Strength through Wisdom: A Critique of U.S. Capability* (1979); and National Science Foundation and U.S. Department of Education, *Science and Engineering Education for the 1980's and Beyond* (1980).

22. National Commission on Excellence in Education, "A Nation at Risk," April 1983, <www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>. Not everyone is convinced that the education system was or is in crisis. See, for example, David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle, *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1995); and Alfie Kohn, *The Schools Our Children Deserve: Moving beyond Traditional Classrooms and "Tougher Standards"* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

23. Ravitch, *National Standards*, pp. 52–53.

24. Ibid., p. 53.

25. See E. D Hirsch Jr., *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988). For an account of the fight between "neopluralists" and "neocentralists" during the Reagan years, see Lawrence A. Uzzell, "Contradictions of Centralized Education," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 53, May 30, 1985.

26 Public Law 103-277C, March 31, 1994, Title I, sec. 102, <http://www.ed.gov/legislation/GOALS2000/TheAct/>.

27. Lynne V. Cheney, "The End of History," *Wall Street Journal*, October 20, 1994, p. A22.

28. See Diane Ravitch, *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), pp. 433–37.

29. Diane Ravitch and Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "The New and Improved History Standards," *Wall Street Journal*, April 3, 1996, or <www.edexcellence.net/library/histstan.html>.

30. Ravitch, *National Standards*, p. xxiv.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., pp. 25–27.

33. Ibid., p. xxiv.

34. Ibid., p. 25. Other leading advocates of national standards are the late Albert Shanker, former president of the American Federation of Teachers, and Chester E. Finn Jr. See Finn, "The Shanker National Education Standards," *Wall Street Journal*, April 9, 1997, <http://www.edexcellence.net/library/shanker.html>, as well as other articles at <http://www.edexcellence.net/topics/standards.html>.

35. Reports of cheating, including giving students an advance look at tests and chances to change answers, came from New York City, Maryland, and California. See, among others, Evan Thomas and Pat Wingert, "Bitter Lessons," *Newsweek*, June 19, 2000, p. 50; "Teachers Cheating?" *Washington Post*, June 1, 2000, p. C13; Martha Groves, "Teachers in Cheating Probe Face Discipline," *Los Angeles Times*, January 22, 2000, p. B1; "Teachers Accused of Giving Out Copies of Standardized Test," Associated Press, April 6, 2000; and David Hoff, "N.Y.C. Probe Levels Test-Cheating Charges," *Education Week*, December 15, 1999, <www.edweek.org/ew/ew_printstory.cfm?slug=16cheat.h19>. But see Anemona Hartocollis, "After Year, Scope of Teacher Cheating Scandal Is Diminished," *New York Times*, February 12, 2001, p. B1.

36. Kohn, pp. 21–22. Emphasis in original.

37. Richard M. Wolf, "National Standards: Do We Need Them?" *Educational Researcher* 27, no. 4 (May 1998): 22.

38. Andrew J. Coulson, *Market Education: The Unknown History* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1999), p. 187. For a summary of the trends in scores, see pp. 178–91.

39. For a criticism of this approach to schooling, see Bruce Goldberg, *Why Schools Fail* (Washington: Cato Institute, 1996).

40. See Sheldon Richman, "Individuality, Education, and Entrepreneurship," in *Education in a Free Society*, ed. Tibor Machan (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 2000), pp. 111–40.

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42. Quoted in James A. Dorn, "Madison's Constitutional Political Economy: Principles for a Liberal Order," *Constitutional Political Economy* 2, no. 2 (1991): 181.

43. F. A. Hayek, "Competition as a Discovery Procedure," in *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics,*

Economics and the History of Ideas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 179.

44. The world is open-ended. Life does not consist merely of adapting known means to achieve known ends. There is always the possibility of discovery of both—hitherto unknown—means and ends. See Israel M. Kirzner, foreword to *Advertising and the Market Process,* ed. Robert B. Ekelund Jr. and David S. Saurman (San Francisco: Pacific Research Institute, 1988), pp. xv-xxii.

45 Quoted in David Boaz, "The Public School Monopoly," in *Liberating Schools: Education in the Inner City,* ed. David Boaz (Washington: Cato Institute, 1991), p. 2.

46. This flaw is admirably explored in John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe, *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1990), pp. 28, 46, 47, 67, 183.

47. Coulson, p. 356.

48. Quoted in Goldberg, p. 103.

49. Ibid., pp. 102-3.

50. Israel M. Kirzner, *Competition and Entrepreneurship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 30-84.

51. For a discussion of those and other private regulatory structures, see Yesim Yilmaz, "Private Regulation: A Real Alternative for Regulatory Reform," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 303, April 20, 1998, <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa-303.pdf>.

52. "Homeschooling" is an unfortunate misnomer, implying that children spend their days at home. In actuality, homeschooling takes place in a variety of settings and is better thought of as extended family-based learning.

53. Quoted in George H. Smith, "Nineteenth-Century Opponents of State Education: Prophets of Modern Revisionism," in *The Public School Monopoly: A Critical Analysis of Education and the State of American Society,* ed. Robert R. Everhart (San Francisco: Pacific Research Institute, 1982).

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55. Charles L. Glenn, *The Ambiguous Embrace: Government and Faith-Based Schools and Social Agencies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 277.

56. See Coulson, pp. 37-72; and E. G. West, *Education and the State: A Study in Political Economy,* 3d ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1994). Patricia Cline Cohen documents the early Americans' passion for numbers and calculation before the advent of government schooling in *A Calculating People: The Spread of Numeracy in Early America* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

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